Federal Postal History of Western Virginia 1861-65

By Arthur Hecht[1]

There are three major research articles printed on the postal history of western Virginia. One was prepared by Delf Norona and covers the period 1792 to 1800.[2] It utilizes material found in the outgoing letters of the Postmaster General and in the *American State Papers*. The second article, entitled "The Confederate Postal Service in West Virginia," was written by Boyd B. Stutler,[3] and is based both on philatelic matter and August Dietz' *The Postal Service of the Confederate States of America* (1929). Stutler, however, completely ignored official Confederate postal records available at the National Archives. The third article is a specialized study by Arthur Boreman Smith which appeared in the 1913 *Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia;* it is entitled "Postal Development in West Virginia." Smith apologized for the scantiness of his facts with the following footnote:

> It is a source of regret that it is almost impossible to glean from the records of the Post Office Department a comprehensive and continuous account of postal development. Practically all the records were destroyed by fire in 1836. Such scraps as remain have been stored and are inaccessible to a large degree. . . .Printed documents are scarce, but little more than summaries are published. It is a source of regret that there is no history of the Department.

Happily for us, Smith was wrong — *all* the records were *not* destroyed by the fire of 1836. Smith missed a great deal in his searches of postal history. According to Congressional investigations of the Post Office Department reported in the January 1837 issues of the *Congressional Globe,* very few departmental postal records were destroyed in the 1836 fire! It has been the continued official dispositions of departmental records from 1880 which brought to an end the "comprehensive and continuous account of postal development."

Printed postal documents[4] are *not* scarce. They are complete and give infinite details about postal operations. There are four official publications available in depository and major university libraries throughout the United States: These are:

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[2] Delf Norona, "Early Postal Service in Western Virginia—1792 to 1800," *West Virginia History*, Volume II, No. 1, October 1940, 36-51.

[3] *West Virginia History* Volume XXIV, No. 1, October 1962, 32-41.

[4] Other printed official data about postal information appears among the *Congressional Documents*, the *American State Papers*, *United States Official Registers*, and the *United States Statutes At Large*.

Annual Reports of the Postmasters General, Postal Laws and Regulations, United States Postal Directories (formerly known as *Guides*), *Postal Bulletins.*

Smith is wrong when he states that there is *no history* of the Post Office Department. The card catalogs of both the Library of Congress and the Reference Library of the Post Office Department contain listings of a half dozen histories before 1913. After that year departmental histories were more objective and appear as special studies, masters theses, or doctoral dissertations. Smith is right, however, when he says that the primary source records of the Post Office Department were "inaccessible" to him. They became available to the public during the early 1940's when they were accessioned by the National Archives from the Post Office Department.

I shall present a brief history of Federal postal activities in western Virginia during 1861-65. It relates to post offices, postmasters, mail routes, newspapers, and the Union military mail service.

During the four years of the Civil War, there were (at one time or another) 615 post offices[5] in fifty western Virginia counties. During that four-year period, there were forty-three new post offices established, twenty-six reopened, eighty-five discontinued, and seven had their named changed. These name changes, incidentally, occurred only on the first day of the succeeding quarterly periods.

The story behind the naming of post offices is very interesting although not always easy to trace. This is because the official correspondence and petitions relating thereto have been systematically disposed of by the Post Office Department with the concurrence of the Congress. However, it is evident that communities in western Virginia are named for pioneers or settlers, family members of postmasters (including wives and daughters), and geographic locations, animals, birds, minerals, manufactories, and ferry transports. We all recognize geographic designations. They include the familiar second words of bluff, creek, dell, falls, fork, gap, glades, grove, hill, island, lick, meadow, mountain, point, river, run, shoals, spring, valley, etc., etc. Animal names were common also — buffalo, deer, elk, mole, racoon, and even wolf. Bird names seemed to be limited to hawk and pigeon. In addition, there were the mineral names of coal, carbon, lead, petroleum, salt, and iron. Manufactories were connected with a mine, a tannery, a furnace, and a large number of mills. Three individuals named Pack, Benton, and Ice not only operated ferries but included that word in the name of their post offices. Six post offices included the name "Store."[6]

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[5] A complete manuscript list of West Virginia post offices for the Civil War period appears among the records of appointments of postmasters which are in the custody of the National Archives and Records Service (Record Group 28).

[6] Anderson's Store (Lewis County)
Guseman's Store (Preston County)
Haymond's Store (Braxton County)
Lorentz's Store (Upshur County)
Maple's Store (Upshur County)
Unger's Store (Morgan County)

As you know, western Virginia had its share of unusual names. Here are some:

> Bald Knob (Boone County), Coalsmouth (Kanawha County), Forks of Twelve Pole (Wayne County), Frozen Camp (Jackson County), Hanging Rock (Hampshire County), Mouth of Buffalo (Logan County), No. 12 Water Station (Morgan County), Quiet Dell (Harrison County), Shanghai (Berkeley County), Ten Mile (Cabell County), Upper Tract (Pendleton County).

During the Civil War there were four classes of post offices. The Presidential offices consisted of the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st classes, and the annual income of their postmasters was $1,000 or more. At 4th class post offices the annual income of their postmasters was less than $1,000. Wheeling and Parkersburg were Presidential offices throughout the Civil War. For the period July 1, 1863 to June 30, 1865, the following West Virginia post offices were classified as Presidential:

	Annual Compensation
3rd Class Post Offices	
Clarksburg	$1,500
Kanawha Court House	1,800
Martinsburg	1,800
Parkersburg	1,900
2nd Class Offices	
Harper's Ferry	2,100
New Creek Station	2,100
1st Class Office	
Wheeling	3,100

There are many statistics for western Virginia post offices[7] included in the annual reports of the Postmasters General for the individual years of 1862, 1863, 1864, and 1865. They show the combined receipts earned by all western Virginia post offices from letters, newspapers, registered letters, stamps sold, incidental expenses of post offices, transportation costs, and postmasters' compensations. These figures are too voluminous to be given at this time. However, to quote one figure will tell much, and that is $147,813.74 was spent for stamps in western Virginia post offices for the year ending June 30, 1863. This large amount was the result of the public using stamps as currency.

There is a little story here, too. In 1862 there was a scarcity of small change. This shortage went hand in hand with the general misconception about the purpose of the act of 1862 which directed the Secretary of the Treasury to furnish "postage and other stamps of the United States" for currency. This act greatly embarrassed the Post Office Department. As soon as the act was passed, extraordinary

[7] The *United States Official Registers* show the names of postmasters, mail contractors, mail route agents, special agents, and clerks of West Virginia and compensations paid to them.

quantities of stamps were purchased exhausting the supply in many post offices. This was a detriment to postal business. Postmasters were instructed to discontinue sales of stamps to persons who intended to use them as currency. Notwithstanding this instruction and other checks and precautions taken at some of the offices, the demand during 1862 was always in excess of the daily supply of stamps.

Wheeling was the largest town in western Virginia. It was a depositor post office, and subject only to official drafts of the Post Office Department, not only retained its own revenue, but also received and retained funds from certain adjacent post offices. Because of the strategic location of Wheeling, it served as an important postal distribution center for the Union armed forces. Throughout the Civil War the *Daily Intelligencer* reported that the Wheeling post office maintained Sunday mail hours' schedules on both Thanksgiving and Christmas. On November 1, 1864, the Wheeling office was authorized to issue money orders. From that date to June 30, 1865, 430 money orders in the amount of $6,468.66 were issued at the Wheeling office.

Let us take a look at the people involved in this great activity — the postmasters. During the 1861-65 period, 998 postmasters served at one time or another at western and West Virginia post offices.[8] Sixteen of them were women.[9] As for the longevity of service, there were five postmasters who served over 36 years at the same post office before, during, and after the Civil War period.[10] There were also during the war period four postmasters who served less than one month at their positions.[11]

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[8] Year ending June 30, 1863: 61 postmasters resigned, 11 were removed, and 3 died; year ending June 30, 1864: 30 postmasters resigned, 5 were removed, and 6 died; year ending June 30, 1865: 78 postmasters resigned, 16 were removed, and 7 died.

[9] Albergania Carpenton, Deep Lick (Mercer County) October 12, 1833 to June 28, 1866; Miss Amanda John, Stewartstown (Monongalia County) October 22, 1861 to October 7, 1868; Miss Virginia Kerr, Uffington (Monongalia County) April 13 to May 16, 1864; Mrs. Catherine Meissner, Franklin Court House (Pendleton County) March 29, 1860 to July 28, 1865; Miss Martha W. Miller, Reedsville (Preston County) August 2 to October 7, 1864; Ann Conrad, Valley Head (Randolph County) August 17, 1860 to September 8, 1865; Mrs. Esther Wyatt, Sistersville (Tyler County) September 4, 1861 to September 15, 1866; Miss Mary Underwood, Shirley (Tyler County) February 6, 1863 to February 8, 1867; Margaret P. Davis, Falling Waters (Berkeley County) March 27, 1860 to July 1, 1866; Mary E. Stump, Gerrardstown (Berkeley County) May 18, 1858 to February 25, 1865; Mrs. Harriet Shade, Gerrardstown (Berkeley County) February 28, 1865 to December 28, 1866; Elizabeth J. Everhart, Point (Berkeley County) August 23, 1860 to April 4, 1866; Mrs. Polly Scruggs, Middle Fork (Lewis County) October 14, 1863 to September 23, 1864; Miss Mary Luella H. Hayes, Clarksburg (Harrison County) August 15, 1863 to February 11, 1867; Mrs. Harriet E. Cain, Barrackville (Marion County) August 2, 1864 to May 25, 1865; Mrs. Margaret A. Campbell, Bethany (Brooke County) February 4, 1864 to May 25, 1865; Hugh Moore, Mill (Pendleton County) June 8, 1827 to January 8, 1865; Andy Rock, Gauley (Nicholas County) June 6, 1833 to February 5, 1866; George W. Lowery (Lowry), Court House (Morgan County) November 30, 1826 to August 8, 1867; James A. Shanklin, Union (Monroe County) [illegible] 1826 to January 24, 1866; Rev. Aaron Mahaffey, Parkersburg (Wood County) July 24 to August 6, 1862; William S. Hamilton, Hamilton (Doddridge County) March 31 to April 15, 1863; John W. Shelton, Romney (Hampshire County) May 13 to June 3, 1861; Amos Young, Rock Cave (Upshur County) [illegible] to September 15, 1865.

[10] Postmaster Carpenton, mentioned above, for whom no dates of service are given in his article "The Confederate Post Office Department in the Trans-Allegheny Region," *West Virginia History*, Volume 24, No. 3, October 1963, Reed, the United States Postmaster in the disputed area of Berkeley County, Virginia, who changed hands from time to time. J. P. Hambleton was appointed postmaster at Charleston and was also commissioned by the Federal government to serve in that capacity in the event of the town's occupation by the Federal forces. [illegible] William M. Brown served alternately

Who could become a postmaster and what was his job like? A candidate for the position of postmaster had to be at least sixteen years of age and an actual resident of the town or city where the post office was situated or within the delivery zone of the office. When he was offered an appointment, a letter containing such an offer and blank forms were sent to him. After the candidate presented a bond with signatures of two sureties, and an oath of office, these were sent to the Post Office Department. Thereupon a commission was sent to the appointee, and he was authorized to take charge of the office. (When the Postmaster General changed the name of an existing post office, the commission was not effective until the postmaster executed a new bond and returned it to the department Appointment Office.)

Each postmaster whose compensation for the year preceding was less than $200 was allowed to send his personal mail and to receive similar mail addressed to him, free of postage, provided that the weight thereof did not go above a half ounce. A postmaster could not hold a mail contract or be concerned in the business of carrying the mail. He was exempt from militia duties and from serving on juries, as well as from any fine or penalty for neglect thereof. The postmaster, however, was not exempt from working on roads, or from obeying a summons to appear in court as a witness or to testify before a grand jury.

After 1859 the appointment of a postmaster was determined on the basis of postal receipts of the office and the previous year's compensation of the postmaster. When the compensation exceeded $1,000 for any year, the postmaster was appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and he could only be removed by the President. At other post offices (4th class offices), the Postmaster General had the sole power of appointment and removal.[12]

The basic duties of all postmasters during the war period were similar. They were charged to: (1) take charge of the office, (2) make up and post bill the mails, (3) receive and dispatch mails, (4) open and close the mail, and (5) deliver and return letters.

There were eight[13] different kinds of commissions by which a postmaster could earn money. He received fifty percent from postage on newspapers, magazine, and pamphlets; seven percent on the amount of postage on letters or packets received for distribution; sixty percent on any postal receipts not exceeding $100; seventy percent on any sum not exceeding $100 where the mail arrived regularly between 9 P.M. and 5 A.M.; fifty percent above $100 and not exceeding

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[12] Information about postmasters contained in the records of the Post Office Department in the National Archives and Records Service is limited to the dates of their appointment. The records do not contain letters or applications from postmasters which include biographical data.

[13] The Wheeling postmaster earned 12½% of the amounts of postage on letters and packages received at his office for distribution.

$400; forty percent above $400 and not exceeding $2,400; fifteen percent above $2,400; and each postmaster was allowed two mills for the delivery from his office to a subscriber of each newspaper not chargeable with postage.

As you know, delivery of mail during this period was no simple matter. There were 167 mail routes in western Virginia shortly before the Civil War began in 1861. Of these, thirty-one were discontinued by March 31, one by April 20, 25 by May 31, and nine between June 20 and December 31, 1861. Sixty-nine mail routes terminated on June 30, 1862, one on Sepember 30 during the same year, and one on January 31, 1863. Only three of the continued mail routes were ever curtailed. Very few mail routes were abandoned.[14] For the period July 1, 1863 to June 30, 1867, eighty-four new mail routes were authorized in West Virginia.

The annual reports of the Postmaster General show that there were about 2,000 miles of mail routes of which three-fourths were known as "star mail routes." The average annual cost of operating the mail routes was slightly over $24,000.

Mail route contracts were let for a term not exceeding four years, and awarded only to free, white persons. Contracts went to the lowest bidder, but a successful bidder had to offer sufficient guarantees for faithful performance. No mention was made of the mode of transportation.[15]

In western Virginia most of the mail was carried by "star" route service. In those days, it was a common practice to mark three stars (or asterisks) on many contracts for mail service which provided "due celerity, certainty, and security." Eventually the transportation of mail by all modes except boat and railroad became known as "star route service." They served small post offices located off the lines of railroad travel as well as individual families who lived in areas between the post offices.

Mail carriers who were negligent in the performance of their duties or who repudiated the obligations of their oaths of allegiance to the Union were deprived of their contracts. This happened to Sanford Scott of Guayandotte and to Eugene T. Brandon of Kingwood.

James McIlvaigh of Boonsboro, Maryland, was awarded mail contract No. 4518 for the period 1859-63. This was the mail route from Kernesville (by way of Shepherdstown, Sharpsburg, and Reedysville) to Boonsboro. McIlvaigh agreed to carry the mail six times a week to Sharpsburg and three times a week from the latter town to Boonsboro. He used a two-horse coach and he received $440 per annum. On October 25, 1861, citizens testified that McIlvaigh

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[14] E. Wass abandoned his mail contract on route 4570 from Spencer (by way of Reedy, Leduc and Smith) to Ravenswood.

[15] The registers of West Virginia mail route contracts in the National Archives and Records Service easily show the manner in which star mail service was carried.

was disloyal to the United States, and his contract was transferred to David Gilbert of Boonsboro. Later, on February 2, 1866, the Post Office Department reported that evidence had been received to prove that McIlvaigh had been loyal to the Government and had taken the required oath of allegiance. McIlvaigh's contract was referred to the Auditor for settlement.

Beginning in 1836, each and every railroad within the United States became a post route. The Postmaster General was authorized to make and enter into mail contracts with many railroad company without advertising for bids.

There were four railroads carrying mail in and out of western Virginia during the Civil War. Not much is known about the services of one of these four — the Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Wheeling Railroad Company. However, there are data on the other three. The Hempfield Railroad Company carried mail between Wheeling and Washington (Pennsylvania), thirty-two and one-half miles, six times a week, for $3,234 per annum. The Northwestern Railroad Company carried mail between Grafton and Parkersburg, 104 miles, six times a week, for $10,400 per annum. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company carried mail between Wheeling and Baltimore, 179 miles, nineteen times per week, for $93,000 per annum. The mail service on this last route throughout the war period was very irregular. The *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) reported frequently that rebels stopped the trains, and on January 22, 1862, there was the story that land slides on the railroad tracks prevented mail service for three days.

The use of horses, wagons, stagecoaches, and railroads were not the only methods of carrying mail between western Virginia communities.[16] During the Civil War, there were three official steamboat mail service routes in operation. Mail route contract No. 4102, from Wheeling to Parkersburg, was held by the Wheeling and Parkersburg Transportation Company. This company ran three packets (*Courier, Express,* and the *Diurnal*),[17] all large side wheelers, over a distance of ninety-six and one-fourth miles, three times a week for $3,600 per annum. The same company held two other mail contracts. Mail contract No. 4109 covered the Parkersburg-Gallipolis (Ohio) route, extending eighty-eight miles, over which the mail was carried three times a week for $2,700 per annum. Mail contract No. 4116 covered the Kanawha Court House-Point Pleasant route, extending fifty-six miles, over which the mail was carried three times a week for $1,400 per annum. There probably were other

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[16] William D. Terry held a special mail contract for the period January 1, 1861 to June 30, 1865, for which he was paid $2,000 per annum. He was responsible for carrying the mail from Wheeling to Bridgeport (Ohio) and between the post office at Wheeling and the train of the Central Ohio and the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad depot at Bridgeport, and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Hempfill Railroad depots at Wheeling, one and one-quarter miles and back, twice daily.

[17] J. Mack Combs, "Steamboats of West Virginia," *West Virginia History*, Volume XX, No. 2, January 1959, 128.

mail services scattered throughout water traffic. Undoubtedly, the packet trade between Pittsburgh and Charleston included mail handling as well as the packet (*Moses McLellan*)[18] which in 1861 ascended the Kanawha River and went to Camp Peat.

The Postmaster General paid not more than three cents for each letter and not more than one-half cent for each newspaper carried on steamboats. The master or manager of any steamboat was ordered to deliver mail within three hours after arrival in the day time, or within two hours after the next sunrise, if the arrival was in the night. The postmaster who received steamboat mail not covered by mail contract, paid the shipmaster two cents for each letter or package delivered to the postmaster; otherwise, the shipmaster was fined $30 for failing to make deliveries.

The variety of rates for different mail, including newspapers, have been mentioned. What were some of the newspapers of that time? During a period of about three weeks during July 1964, nearly 1,500 western and West Virginia newspapers for the period 1861-65 were examined in the newspaper room of the Library of Congress. These included the *Virginia Press* (Charleston), *The National Telegraph* (Clarksburg), *The Ritchie Press* (Harrisville), *The American Gazette* and the *American Union* (Harrisville), *The Parkersburg Gazette,* the *Register* (Shepherdstown), and the *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling). The types of postal references which appeared in those newspapers are lists of letters, proposals for mail service, post office changes, railroad mail schedules, postal laws and regulations and instructions, censorship of mail, and miscellaneous mail information.

Let us examine these items individually and a little more in detail. First, lists of letters. These were advertisements for uncalled-for letters which were usually inserted in a newspaper and in the one that had the most extensive circulation in the city, town, or village in which the post office was located. The postmaster was required to post in a conspicuous place in his office a copy of such list on the date after its publication. The frequency of advertising lists of letters fluctuated with the gross receipts of a particular post office for the preceding quarter.[19]

Lists of letters showed the names of addressees.[20] These were entered alphabetically by surname, followed by the first and/or second name or initial. Seldom was there more than one letter for each person. Each list showed also the date as well as the name of the postmaster submitting it and the name of his office. Occasionally, there were instructions at the head of the list stating that the person who calls for an advertised letter must pay a one-cent charge. He must also be sure to designate the word "advertised" when requesting the

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[18] *Ibid.*, 121.

[19] Under $500, once every six weeks; over $500 and not over $1,000, once a month; over $1,000 not exceeding $1,500, twice a month; over $1,500, once a week.

[20] There were from 30 to 400 names on a list.

letter(s). Uncalled-for letters were held one month and then forwarded to the Dead Letter Office at Washington City. The lists appearing in the *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) had three categories, namely, "Ladies," "Gentlemen," and "Initials" (fraternal orders).

Second, proposals for mail service. Advertisements for proposals for mail service appeared in a Washington newspaper and simultaneously published in the State or States, or Territory, where the mail contracts were to be in force. They were printed at least twelve weeks before the contract was to be let. Each mail route proposals showed the places to and from which the mail was to be carried, the time it was to be made up, and hour at which it was to be delivered.

The advertisements for mail service in western Virginia appear in *The National Telegraph* (Clarksburg) for March 7 and 14, and October 3, 1862, and in the *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) for March 4 and December 18, 1862. The June 20, and October 31, 1862, issues of *The National Telegraph* contain mail proposals for carrying mail in *each* State of the United States for the period July 1, 1862 to June 30, 1864.

Third, post office changes. The September 23, 1861, issue of the *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) reported the establishment, discontinuance, or the name changes of the post offices at Adamsville, Boner's, Coveton, Glover's Gap, Laurel Point, Meadowville, Morgan's Glades, Millfall, Nines, Prospect Valley, Springdale, and Trayhorn's.

Fourth, railway mail schedules. *The National Telegraph* (Clarksburg) and the *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) regularly contain announcements of the railway mail schedules of the Northwestern Railroad from Grafton to Parkersburg, of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from Wheeling to Baltimore, of the Hempfield Railroad from Wheeling to Washington (Pennsylvania), and of the Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Wheeling Railroad.

Fifth, postal laws, regulations, and instructions. Several major postal laws and regulations were passed during the Civil War period. During 1862 there were two postal laws approved by Congress: (1) prohibition of the removal of cancelled stamps from the papers to which they were attached and used fraudulently, and (2) directing the Secretary of the Treasury to furnish "postage and other stamps of the United States for currency." The law of 1863 authorized free delivery letter service. Although such service was not authorized in West Virginia until August 1, 1873, and in Wheeling, the July 29, 1864, issue of the weekly *National Telegraph* (Clarksburg) printed instructions for the delivery and handling of letters by carriers at private residences. The law of 1864 authorized the establishment of a uniform money-order system at all post offices found suitable by the Postmaster General. Wheeling became one of those offices during the early part of 1865.

The newspapers also contained frequent instructions for obtaining the following kinds of letters: those advertised by postmasters in their possessions, those franked as "soldiers' letters," those discontinued franked letters sent to congressmen, the use of ruled stamped envelopes by postmasters in exchange for others, and the continued use of old stamps in 1861 until the newly authorized stamps could be printed and distributed in sufficient supply.

Sixth, censorship of mail. During September of 1861 Morgantown subscribers to the *Baltimore Sun* complained that their issues were withheld by F. Madera, their postmaster. This withholding action had been ordered by the marshal for the Western District of Virginia (E. M. Norton) because the editor of the *Baltimore Sun* had been indicted for treason. Other remarks about censorship of newspapers will be mentioned in another portion of this talk.

And seventh, miscellaneous information. The *Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling) is the only West Virginia newspaper which had continuous publication throughout the Civil War period. Although it contained Associated Press, pony express, and telegraphic features, it had few correspondents during the 1861-65 period and depended on other newspapers for news.

What kind of articles did the *Daily Intelligencer* publish? What kind of postal news made column headlines? The following examples will answer those questions:

On August 28, 1861, there was the story that such New York newspapers as the *Journal of Commerce, News, Day Book, Fireman's Journal* and the *Brooklyn Eagle* were considered traitorous to the Union cause. During that same month J. Kelly, a Confederate spy, was caught with an immense number of letters from people living in the South addressed to their friends in Baltimore. John Bingham, Superintendent of the Pennsylvania Division of the Adams Express Company, ordered his agents to refuse mail intended for the south of Washington and south of the Ohio River.

During a specific week in September of 1861, it was reported that 723 letters addressed to persons in the seceded states were received and detained at the New York post office. At about the same time, the Postmaster General ordered newspapers and printed matter intended for the Pacific Coast to be kept in bags separate from other mail. Other articles described new postage stamps and the operations of the Overland Mail Service in the Far West.

During December of 1861 the newspapers reprinted the statement that of the 68,000 letters sent by one Massachusetts regiment stationed in Maryland since its departure from home, 26,000 were addressed to "Miss" and 21,000 to "Mrs." In the same month and year, the Post Office Department announced that the last two mails between Havana and Mexico City were intercepted by Spanish

steamers. Spanish authorities were accused of suppressing United States mail.

There were also news stories about crime. In February of 1862, several Wheeling firms reported the theft of moneys they sent through the mails. During the same month the use of a new type of letter envelope was inaugurated. The new envelope was open at one end. When the letter was slipped into it, the overlap was sealed. On March 19, 1862, the *Daily Intelligencer* printed the story of the arrest of one Wesley Gates for purloining money letters in Newark, Ohio.

The Civil War period, of course, involved the handling of the great quantities of military mail. Statistics concerning military participation of western Virginians are naturally varied. A WPA guide to West Virginia mentions that West Virginia contributed 36,530 soldiers to the Union Army and about 7,000 to the Confederate Army. The Governor's message of January 19, 1864,[21] quotes 26,540 soldiers to the United States. (There were only 33,774 men in the State of military age.)

To keep up the morale of fighting men, Congress authorized the military to send their letters without prepayment of postage. This free mail privilege was granted to soldiers beginning July 24, 1861, and to sailors and marines as of January 21, 1862. The postage on letters written by servicemen was paid by recipients. (This was directly contrary to postal regulations for civilians, a rule which was then being rigorously enforced.) Neither was there any postage charged on letters written by servicemen which had to be forwarded. These letters were marked *Soldiers' Letter* or *Naval Letter* and bore the sender's unit designation, together with the name of his unit commander or executive officer (and name of vessel).

Franked mail of Army officers, marked *Official Business*, and not exceeding four ounces, was extended to them on October 7, 1861.

At best, military mail service was unreliable. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad carried mail to the troops in the Shenandoah Valley with Harper's Ferry serving as the distributing office. Mail service from that junction of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers was irregular much of the time. The same perils, fatigues, and privations to which fighting men were subjected, were endured by army mail carriers in their job of bringing letters, packets, and packages, by wagons and by horseback, to the ever-moving regiments and brigades. Because of the nature of war, there were frequent changes of positions of units and this naturally slowed down or prevented the delivery of mail; many letters, consequently, were sent to the Dead Letter Office. Such letters frequently contained descrip-

[21] *Journal of the House of Delegates of West Virginia, 2d Session*, 7.

tive lists, certificates of discharges, money, card photographs, daguerreotypes, and other miscellany sent to soldiers.

There were many complaints about losses of money transmitted in letters between military men and their families. Some losses were unavoidable due to the state of war, but there were other losses caused by the theft of money from letters by military postmasters and by post office messengers hired in haste. Other losses were due to the fact that soldiers did not personally deposit their own letters in post offices. Also, letters were called for at post offices by persons who had no authority to do so.

In November of 1861, newspapers began advising soldiers to send letters with valuables by the registry system. To guard against the numerous losses by soldiers, effective March 3, 1862, a trustworthy agent was to be appointed by the command of each regiment or brigade in the various camps to receive letters from soldiers containing valuable enclosures. These letters required a registry fee of five cents in addition to the regular postage stamps. Army agents delivered the registered letters to convenient post offices daily or as often as the mail was forwarded therefrom. Duplicate lists of these registered letters, showing the names of the writers and to whom their letters were addressed, were signed by local postmasters or their registering clerks, and copies of the lists were retained both by military and civilian authorities.

In spite of these precautions, however, the contents of valuable letters to and from soldiers continued to be rifled by mail messengers, clerks, and military postmasters. In 1863 the Post Office Department suggested a way to correct or lessen the complaints. It advised commanding officers to select competent and reliable persons to supervise the reception, transmission, and delivery of letters and packets. This proposal was not tried until June 20, 1864, when Special Order No. 39 authorized Army corps commanders to appoint disabled officers or non-commissioned officers to act as corps postmasters.

From the very beginning of the Civil War, the Union Army found itself involved with the censorship of mail. Although the Postmaster General closed the mails to most radical sheets which sympathized with the rebellion, there was still the impression (obtained from reading some northern newspapers) that they were substantially unrelented. The Post Office Department accused some newspaper publishers of printing articles which thwarted efforts made to preserve the integrity of the Union, and went so far as to say they accomplished the results of open treason without incurring judicial penalties therefor.

By May of 1861 the following secessionist newspapers fell: The *Weston Herald*, *Register*, *Jeffersonian*, *True Virginia*, and the *Parkersburg News*. The *Kanawha Valley Star* collapsed on July 2, 1861, when Federal troops entered Charleston and the newspaper plant was subsequently confiscated.

Until the defeat of the Union Army at the Battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861, rebellious newspapers were tolerated with some patience by the public, for freedom of the press was guaranteed by the constitution. Newspapers in the border States were hardest to control, and the Federal Government took an attitude conspicuous for its leniency with recalcitrant editors. After that famous major Virginia battle, however, seditious articles on what many called the "present unholy war" and savage attacks on soldiers were looked upon as treasonable and as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Public reaction was high against these newspapers. Early in 1862 other western Virginia secessionist newspapers were suspended, namely, *Spirit of Jefferson, Independent Democrat, American, Constitution, Intelligencer, Argus,* and the *Daily Press.*

Notwithstanding the suppression of secessionist newspapers in western Virginia and elsewhere throughout the country, and in spite of the destruction of bundles of newspapers in depots and express offices by United States marshals, there continued to be undaunted publishers who were tenacious in distributing their seditious papers outside of the mails (which the law allowed) as late as 1863. Ineffectual postal restrictions as late as November 19, 1862, resulted in persistent demands by military authorities for more immediate corrective measures. The Postmaster General ordered the suppression of offending sheets and the imprisonment of their editors and owners, and army generals forbade the circulation, distribution, and sale of the most offensive publications in their districts and even sent troops to seize type and paper in certain areas of the country.

The Post Office Department appreciated the invaluable help of the military in getting the mails through, and the Department did not forget and expressed its appreciation in a very concrete manner. To aid those servicemen discharged, on June 19, 1865,[22] the Postmaster General sent a circular letter to each of his postmasters. He reminded them on March 3, 1865, Congress recognized its responsibility to military personnel by approving a joint resolution suggesting that servicemen disabled by wounds or sickness incurred in line of duty "should be preferred to appoint to civil offices, provided they shall be found to possess the business capacity necessary for the proper discharge of the duty of such offices." The Postmaster General then requested his deputies to apply the resolution as far as practicable whenever they had occasions to appoint clerks or other employees in their offices.